Jul 6, 2019

A Wise Future
Proverbs 3:1-12 Sermon

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Last week we celebrated several high-school graduates. When I surprised them by asking for one things we could pray for them, George asked for prayer that it would all "end well." Now we weren't exactly sure what that meant. But I think he meant successfully wrap up the end of this stage of his life and smoothly transition into the next stage, college.

I remember one of the things I worried about a lot when I was a high school graduate was my future. What was I supposed to do? What should I get a degree in? What did God want me to do? And those of us who are future-oriented people probably worry about similar things like this. What job does God want me to do? Where does he want our family to live? Or maybe how will I pay the bills or where will I go to school?

Today in Proverbs God doesn't tell us what is going to happen in the detail we might like but he does say that if we trust and obey him with today, he will take care of the rest. A wise future is not a worried future. A wise future is something completely different.

I want to give you my big idea up front. Here it is. ***Submit your whole life to God and he will take care of the rest.*** As we we walk through this life God gives us the gift of confidence in him—that if we seek him and his ways he will make it worth it. The first verse of Proverbs 3 introduces us to this future-hope.

> 1 My son, do not forget my teaching,
> but keep my commands in your heart,
> 2 for they will prolong your life many years
> and bring you peace and prosperity.

If we seek to understand and obey God's teachings and commands found in the Bible one of the benefits God may grant us is a long, peaceful, and prosperous life. But this is different than the prosperity gospel, which promises that you will get what you want if you just have enough faith. This is saying that as we treat others well and live the way God intends natural blessings may result.

But Proverbs are not so much promises for this life as they are principles for this life and promises for the life to come. A life lived God's way will generally result in long-life, peace, and prosperity in this life. And a life lived God's way will most certainly result in long-life, peace, and prosperity in the life to come with Jesus. While the short-term benefits of Proverbs aren't guarantees the long-term benefits are. *Submit your whole life to God and he will take care of the rest*.

Verses 1-2 act as an introduction to verses 3-12, which includes five-admonitions (speaking with authority) that all fall under this umbrella concept of "How to submit your whole life to God:" First, if you want God to take care of your future…

1. Submit your heart. (v3-4)

> 3 Let love and faithfulness never leave you;
> bind them around your neck,
> write them on the tablet of your heart.

4 Then you will win favor and a good name
in the sight of God and man. (NIV)

What type of love and faithfulness are we to have? As these verses come right after verses 1-2 I think it's first talking about a love for God and his Word. We find this same thing in a famous passage our verses in Proverbs are echoing, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, the Shema (which is Hebrew for "hear"). The Shema says:

Deuteronomy 6:4-9
Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (NIV)

The Shema ties loving God with loving and knowing God's words. You can't love someone without first listening to them. If at the end of a long day, Monica is trying to share her experiences with me, and I ignore her because I'm busy, is that loving? We talked about ways we can receive God's Word last week—by believing it, memorizing it, accepting it. *So submit your heart to God by loving his word*. Simple, right?

When I talk to most people I find we want to love God's Word but find it kind of boring. The Bible is super long and can be hard to read (aff link). And if that's what it means, at least partially, to submit your heart to God, then that can be frustratingly difficult. Most of us don't immediately love the Bible when we pick it up.

For many of us, it takes time to develop love. Mark recently told me "love" is spelled "t-i-m-e… time." If you want to love to God, if you want to submit your heart to him, spend time with him. Spend time in the Word. If you have trouble doing it alone, then study God's Word with a friend or in a group. Maybe you won't love it at first but the longer you spend with God's words the more you will begin to develop that feeling of love over time.

What's the reward? The benefit? God will be pleased and others will (Lord willing) see a life well-lived and give you their favor. They'll respect you and treat you fairly as you treat them with respect and fairness. How do we submit our whole-lives to God? *It starts with submitting our hearts*. Second…

2. Submit your will. (v5-6)

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
6 in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight. (NIV)

This is our next foundation verse because so many people have found it to be an encouragement. What does it mean to not lean on your own understanding? We're not to separate our will from God's desired will as expressed in the Scriptures. So if God says to live a certain way (even if we find it hard to understand or difficult to do) we must submit our will to his will. This all comes down to trust. Do we trust God, who made us and created us and knows how we work, or do we trust ourselves?

Remember in my second sermon in Proverbs how I talked about the two paths? God gives each of us the opportunity to walk down path #1 "the way of the foolish" or path #2 "the way of the wise." Sometimes we think this means God is going to tell us our exact path, like he's going to map out our lives for us. That doesn't seem to be how God works or what the Bible says. God rarely tells us what to do but he does give us

guidance for how to do it. Let me repeat that. God rarely tells us what to do but he does give us guidance for how to do it—that's what it means to walk in the way of wisdom.

- God rarely tells us what job we are supposed to take but he does give us guidance for how to work in an ethical, fair, and just manner.

> **Proverbs 22:29**
> Do you see someone skilled in their work?
> They will serve before kings;
> they will not serve before officials of low rank. (NIV)

- God rarely tells us where to live but he does give us guidance for how to treat our neighbors well.

> **Proverbs 3:29**
> Do not plot harm against your neighbor,
> who lives trustfully near you. (NIV)

- God rarely tells us who we are supposed to marry but the kind of person we should marry.

> **Proverbs 12:4**
> A wife of noble character is her husband's crown,
> but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones. (NIV)

It's as we do these things that God will take care of our futures. It's as we walk down the path of wisdom that we can be confident that it will "end well." *First, submit your heart and second, submit your will.*

Before we move onto the third way to submit your whole life to God I want to play a brief minute and a half video of one businessman describing his love for God's Word in Proverbs and how he learns to trust God's ways in them (play video). *Submit your whole life to God and he will take care of the rest. First, submit your heart, second, submit your will. Third…*

3. Submit your perspective. (v7-8)

> 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes;
> fear the Lord and shun evil.
> 8 This will bring health to your body
> and nourishment to your bones. (NIV)

Proverbs isn't like our modern-day self-help books that tell us how great we are and how we can do it. It does just the opposite. It tells us not to think of ourselves too highly but to think of God highly. There's a parallel here between being "wise in your own eyes" and "shun[ing] evil." To be wise in your own eyes—to think you have it all figured out—is evil. To be wise in your own eyes is really really bad in the book of Proverbs. It's worse than being a fool.

> **Proverbs 26:12**
> Do you see a person wise in their own eyes?
> There is more hope for a fool than for them. (NIV)

I was sitting outside the library in Falmouth this week and I looked over at a tree that had red leaves and it was one of the most beautiful trees I'd ever seen. Its leaves were a vivid red, it was full, it was lush. But then I wondered if I was seeing it right because I was wearing sunglasses. I took them off and the tree became a dull dry red. My lenses were distorting reality—making it look better than it actually was. I put my

sunglasses back on and it became vivid-red again. Have you ever heard the expression "rose-colored glasses"? Sometimes we see things for better than what they are. Proverbs warns us that this is nowhere more true than when we are looking in the mirror. We don't see ourselves for who we are but for who we want to be. We all think our reasons and motivations and actions are better than they actually are.

But there is a way we can change our perspective. We need brothers and sisters in Christ who love us enough to tell us what we really look like. It's as God uses them to change our point of view (POV) that we can walk down the path of wisdom. It's actually as God is changing our perspective that we can see how he has taken care of our past and have faith he will take care of our future. *Submit your whole life to God and he will take care of the rest. First, submit your heart, second, submit your will, third, submit your perspective.* Fourth…

4. Submit your money. (v9-10)

9 Honor the Lord with your wealth,
with the firstfruits of all your crops;
10 then your barns will be filled to overflowing,
and your vats will brim over with new wine. (NIV)

Proverbs is brilliant. Maybe you think it's going off on a tangent but the author Solomon knows exactly what he's doing. When we start to worry about the future what's one of the first things we do, we close up our wallets and our generosity dries up. We cling to our money.

Proverbs 11:24
One person gives freely, yet gains even more;
another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.

If we trust God will provide for all our needs, even in want we can still find ways to be generous and give to the Lord and others. We can give confidently and joyfully that he will take care of us. *Submit your whole life to God and he will take care of the rest. First, submit your heart, second, submit your will, third, submit your perspective, fourth, submit your money.* Fifth…

5. Submit your sin. (v11-12)

11 My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline,
and do not resent his rebuke,
12 because the Lord disciplines those he loves,
as a father the son he delights in. (NIV)

Come to God's Word and receive your Heavenly Father's loving correction. We have a Heavenly Father who loves us so much he is willing to correct us. Here's the Gospel connection. He loves us so much he was willing to discipline his one and only Son in whom he delighted so that you and I can be forgiven. The Father allowed his perfect Son, a Son who had done no wrong, a Son who always submitted to his Father's will, to be punished as a guilty sinner so that you and I can be counted as righteous. It's like the Father sees us through rose-colored glasses because of the blood of Jesus. Instead of seeing us as sinful and dirty, he sees us through the lens of Jesus, as holy, forgiven, and loved. Jesus' life was cut short so that you and I can experience an eternally long, completely peaceful, and unimaginably prosperous life to come.

At the end of the day it's impossible to perfectly submit your heart and will and perspective and money and sin to the Lord. If you walk out of here and try to do it in your own strength you'll become disenfranchised that Christianity doesn't work. It's impossible to perfectly submit to God. But Jesus did. And by doing so he won us eternal life. And now, empowered and lead by the Holy Spirit, you and I can begin to submit our

hearts and wills and perspectives and money and sin to the Lord and one day when we're welcomed into eternity God will finish the job he started—making us perfect like Christ.

Submit your whole life to God and he will take care of the rest.

Don't worry about the future. God will take care of it. Focus today on walking down that path of wisdom and God will lead you where he wants you. *Submit your heart, your will, your perspective, your money, and your sin*. ***Submit your whole life to God and he will take care of the rest.***

Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, MA on July 6th, 2019 when he served there as pastor. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon at archive.org or read an online version on Substack. Jonathan attended Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS) where he earned his Master of Divinity (M.Div) and Doctor of Ministry (D.Min) degrees.

Discussion Questions

Questions for small groups, Bible studies, or personal devotionals:

1. Are you future, present, or past oriented?
2. What does it mean to submit your heart to God?
3. What does it mean to submit your will to God?
4. What does it mean to submit your perspective to God?
5. What does it mean to submit your money to God?
6. What does it mean to submit your sin to God?
7. How can doing these things re-orient our lives?
8. Will we ever do these things perfectly? Who does this turn us to?

Resource Recommendations

Some of the links in this manuscript are affiliate links ("aff link"), which means we get a small percentage if you purchase the resource through the link. We recommend checking out your local library or thrift store.

How To Read Proverbs (affiliate link) by Tremper Longman III

The Book of Proverbs by BibleProject

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart

Proverbs: God's Great Self-Help Book by Theology of Work Project (1:26 Video)

Free Sermon Notes Worksheet (PDF)

Proverbs Sermon Series

Go through the Proverbs with Jonathan Romig in this sermon series: Everyday Wisdom

Endnotes

Jesus too says, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matt 6:33) (NIV)

You can watch this sermon on YouTube.